

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I would like to submit this written statement to the Committee as a formal document of my testimony today.

My name is Joe Garagiola, and I'm here on behalf of the National Spit Tobacco Education Program (NSTEP) to talk about tobacco legislation being considered by the U.S. Senate, especially spit tobacco. I'm the National Chairman of NSTEP, which is a program of Oral Health America in Chicago, funded in part by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Our purpose is to try to educate the American public to the dangers of spit - or what this legislation refers to as 'smokeless' - tobacco.

OPENING STATEMENT

I'd like to begin by telling you why I got involved in speaking out about how dangerous spit tobacco is. I don't claim to be an expert. I'm not a doctor or a researcher, and I'm not a "numbers guy." I'm an average guy who saw something was wrong. When I was doing Major League Baseball's Game of the Week broadcasts in the 70's and 80's, I was trying to let players know that spit tobacco was bad. Then, in 1993, a couple of things happened, and I felt I had to do something.

First, a great coach and a good friend of mine, Jack Krol, was diagnosed with oral cancer. Jack worked with the San Diego Padres and the St. Louis Cardinals, and managed the Louisville Redbirds in the American Association. "Damn dipping," Jack said in 1993, after surgery to remove the cancer. "My doctor told me I had to stop, but I had to lose part of my tongue to learn." By May of 1994, my friend was dead.

I also work with the Baseball Assistance Team (BAT), which helps former members of the baseball family who have come up against hard times. I was contacted by Gloria Tuttle, wife of former Major Leaguer Bill Tuttle. Bill played in the 50's and 60's, and used spit tobacco for a number of years. Bill had also been diagnosed with cancer, and his doctors had told him that his type of carcinoma is only caused by using spit tobacco. Bill underwent major surgery in November of 1993 to remove the cancerous tumor from inside his cheek. The doctors described the tumor as the largest malignant growth they had ever removed from a patient's mouth.

Then I saw a study from our home state of Arizona, Mr. Chairman, that scared me. The exact words of this report were that, "In Arizona in 1993, 9.8% of 3rd to 6th graders in our state were reported as users of smokeless tobacco." That was scary. I had already seen what these products had done to at least two of my friends, and I was going to talk about it wherever I went.

Two organizations in particular helped me develop the NSTEP campaign. First I met a member of the Board of Directors of Oral Health America. They're dedicated to public health issues like this one. Then, the President of Little League Baseball introduced me to Romano & Associates, a communications firm who has produced a number of public health awareness campaigns.

Together, we held a press conference in Washington, D.C. in October of 1994. Henry Aaron and the late Mickey Mantle agreed to appear, and also former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders and National League President Len Coleman. Our goal that day was to start letting the American public know the untold story about how dangerous spit tobacco is. Mantle and Aaron drew the crowd, but all you had to do was look at Bill Tuttle's scarred face to know the truth about what spit tobacco can do.

Soon thereafter, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agreed to fund our first round of public service announcements (PSAs), featuring such Major League Baseball celebrities as Jeff Bagwell of the Houston Astros and Frank Thomas of the Chicago White Sox. Baseball was a natural choice since many people associate spit tobacco with the game. By working with baseball, we could educate millions of fans, and at the same time work to break the link between baseball and spit tobacco. Not long after these spots began airing, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton, New Jersey provided funding, and we were really on our way.

Mr. Chairman, as you may know, NSTEP has received considerable support from President Clinton and members of his Administration. In addition, we are currently working with the Honorable Michael Moore, Attorney General of the State of Mississippi, to develop a spit tobacco awareness and education program for the young people of his state.

In my mind, spit tobacco is not a political issue. It's a public health issue. It's a saving lives issue. I've seen too much of what spit tobacco can do, and I'll tell you this: Cancer does not have a party. It attacks anyone, young or old, black or white, man or woman, Democrat or Republican. It's about time that the American public learns the truth about spit tobacco.

We need to make an investment in the health of our children. We need education on the dangers of using spit tobacco. That's why I'm happy about what the many state Attorneys General have tried to accomplish, and that's why I'm here today.

DISCUSSION OF LEGISLATION

Advertising

The tobacco companies have a word, and the guy who came up with that word should get a huge bonus. With that one word, these companies put a whole new spin on the spit tobacco industry. The word is 'smokeless,' and this word is now so much a part of our national consciousness that it's even been adopted within the language of this bill, and I wish they would change it to spit tobacco. Let's not give them any more free advertising.

My biggest battle in educating people about spit tobacco has been to convince them that 'smokeless' does not mean harmless. 'Smokeless' is a nice, fuzzy, insulated word that makes you think it's a safe alternative to smoking, but it's not. Not only isn't it safe, it's highly addictive.

For too long, spit tobacco has been advertised in a glitzy, glossy way. It's always a cowboy sitting on a rail fence. They give you the feeling that if you don't use spit tobacco, you can't be a real man. They always use a rugged, healthy face, but that's not the real face of spit tobacco. The real face of spit tobacco is Bill Tuttle's. It's Jack Krol's. It's Rick Bender, who began using spit tobacco when he was 12, and by the age of 26 had to have much of his face removed to save him from the cancer. Rick has had to endure the pain and humiliation of being asked by his own child to park on the other side of the street when he picks him up from school, so that the other children won't see what his father looks like.

We need to make tobacco companies tell the whole story. I've seen their ads myself, and I know how misleading they can be. As much as I want young people and adults alike to know the truth about spit tobacco, I also do not want young people to see misleading ads.

Make the tobacco companies talk about just their product, without the sounds and the effects. Make them talk about the texture of it, the smell of it, what it can do, what it's good for. Don't let them tell our kids that if they wanna be a cowboy or a race car driver, they have to use this stuff. They use slogans like, "Real men don't compromise, they cope." I don't want them telling kids what a real man is. To my way of thinking, a real man is Bill Tuttle -- someone who will stand up and tell the truth.

Packaging

Even though NSTEP and baseball have been telling people that spit tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking for a few years now, the tobacco companies have been free to state otherwise for many years ahead of us. Tobacco companies need to say right on the can or pouch that spit tobacco has nicotine in it, and this is a highly addictive substance.

This is a crucial point. Some baseball players have told me that they aren't

addicted to spit tobacco, claiming that they can quit anytime they want to. They say they only use it during the season, or they only use it during the off-season when they're fishing or getting the mail. What they don't say is that they go fishing every day, or check the mailbox ten times.

Other players admit that they're addicted and can't beat it alone. I personally asked Lenny Dykstra, a longtime member of the Philadelphia Phillies, if he could curb his spit tobacco use during the 1993 World Series, because there would be millions of people watching. Lenny wanted to help, but he told me straight, "Joe, I can't." Because of the nicotine, that's the kind of hold that spit tobacco can have on a person. Curt Schilling, also with the Phillies, believes his addiction to spit tobacco is no different from a guy who is addicted to illicit drugs or cigarettes, and we've all heard those kinds of horror stories. Thankfully, many players are beginning to win their battles against spit tobacco, but it isn't easy, and there are a lot of people who still need help.

I'm very proud of the fact that NSTEP has worked with Major League Baseball, the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society (PBATS) and the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) to create a spit tobacco cessation program for Major League players, implemented for the first time in 1998. These players will have access to the finest cessation counselors in the country. However, unlike with smoking, there is very little in the way of spit tobacco cessation treatment for the general public.

Marketing

Since I got involved in the spit tobacco issue, I've often said that the tobacco companies have a lot of money, and I can't fight that. Nor can NSTEP completely counteract what money can buy them in the way of marketing. Putting the image of spit tobacco on a racing car or a music concert sends the message that you have to use spit tobacco to be a part of these things, but spit tobacco doesn't let you drive a car faster or hit a ball further. It's just not true.

Free samples are another thing. When they give out the free samples to college kids during Spring Break, it isn't some old, bald catcher like me that's handing them out. It's a healthy, beautiful, young woman in a bikini, probably saying it's 'cool' or something. These young guys, their testosterone is going off the charts when they see this. What message are they getting?

These free samples are only the beginning of a graduated program. These flavor packets taste like hard candy, they're sweet, and they're an easy introduction that helps you step up to the next level. This kind of marketing is geared toward hooking the young and inexperienced user, and that's why most of the free samples are starter products.

Disclosure of Ingredients

As I've said many times, the essence of the NSTEP campaign is truth and education. Stating on the can what's in spit tobacco is simply an additional piece of truth, more knowledge that anyone who is considering trying it can use to make an informed choice. I truly believe that if spit tobacco users understood exactly what they're putting in their bodies and the risks they're taking, they'd make a different choice. They'd make the right choice, and walk away from it. Unfortunately, they don't know, and by the time they finally do, it's too late. They're addicted.

I know baseball players who won't drink a soda because they don't want to put some of those chemicals in their body, but these same players will use spit tobacco all day long because they don't realize what's in it. Parents have said to me, "My child doesn't drink or smoke or use drugs. How bad can spit tobacco be?"

Spit tobacco contains nicotine, which is highly addictive. It can contain formaldehyde, as well as a number of other carcinogens. I've even heard the acting Surgeon General state this past December that some tobacco companies have used ground glass in their spit tobacco products, because the glass irritates the capillaries in the mouth and allows nicotine to be absorbed more quickly. This is just incredible, and it goes without saying that anyone purchasing spit tobacco has a right to know about these ingredients.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, I'm not anti-tobacco, I'm anti-cancer. I don't have all the answers, but we're facing an oral cancer epidemic in this country, and this epidemic has so far been silent.

Whenever I read anything about tobacco, it's always about smoking. Bill Tuttle's story is only one of many, but no one has been talking about spit tobacco. Now, NSTEP and baseball are talking, and hopefully the Congress will join its voice with ours. The truth of spit tobacco is scary. It's dangerous, addictive and potentially deadly. We have to get that story out.

Thank you.